



Speech by

**Mrs J. GAMIN**

**MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH**

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Hansard 1 December 1999

### **PROSTITUTION BILL**

**Mrs GAMIN** (Burleigh—NPA) (3.54 p.m.): It is a pity that, after all the years of investigating prostitution, surveys, reports, statistics, consultation and public hearings, the Government has come up with a very flawed model that has caused dismay and consternation within church and community organisations throughout the cities and shires of this State. In this Bill, we are not talking about the containment and regulation of Queensland's sex industry. What these changes are actually going to do is to expand the prostitution industry, firstly by licensing brothels in non-residential areas and secondly by increasing the number of single operators in residential areas. This may not have been the actual intent of the Bill, but it will be the ultimate effect of the Bill.

The Goss Government's model of single operators working without security simply did not work and was extremely dangerous for those sex workers who worked on their own. There were obvious risks, simply because of the nature of the industry and the types of people who seek sex services. The new model will not work either.

Although it has some merit, the new method of single operators being allowed to engage security guards will cause single prostitutes or solo operators to fall into two classes. There will be an upper class of those who can afford security guards, that is, operators with the ability to attract a client base and the ability to charge enough to meet security costs. Of course, those security guards will end up acting as pimps, which will increase crime and expand prostitution in residential areas. There will be a lower class of prostitutes who cannot afford security. For whatever reason, they do not have the ability to attract a well-heeled client base. They will still be at risk as they have been for the past six or seven years.

The idea of licensing brothels in industrial areas may have had some merit, but the 200 metre buffer zone only applies to boutique brothels and not to sole operators. Although by their zonings smaller CBDs may be protected from licensed brothels, the single operators will continue to have a clear run. A popular expression today is "brothels are on their way to a suburb near you". That is quite likely to happen under the legislation that we are now considering. "Boutique brothels" is really a very silly name that has been chosen for these licensed establishments. There has been strong criticism from church and community groups, as well as local councils throughout the State.

Living in the same street or apartment building as sex workers can be hell, with drunks banging on the door late at night, foul language, especially when clients knock on the wrong door and are turned away, and the threat of sheer physical danger that is posed by angry clients. Men who turn up in suburban streets looking for prostitutes are usually not the sort of people whom the neighbours want hanging around. It is no joke to have angry and aggressive clients searching for an address that they have been given over the phone by a prostitute. That may have scribbled it down on the back of cigarette packet, and they can often get it wrong. Local residents just hate it. There is absolutely no protection for neighbours who have to put up with the disturbance caused by drunk or drugged and noisy clients who are refused entry to a brothel. Then there is a further disturbance when the police arrive on the scene.

Many councils—certainly the bigger councils—have rules and regulations controlling home occupations and the operations of private businesses from residential addresses. Some councils impose heavy fines on truck operators and furniture removalists for parking their vehicles overnight in

suburban areas. Most citizens would rather have a truck packed outside their door than see a stream of cars in the street day and night—cars that are associated with a mini brothel.

I know that there are supposed to be restrictions on advertising, but I should not be at all surprised to see some fairly tasteless advertising, which will be a lucrative business. There will possibly be television advertising and even cinema screen advertising. They will get around it.

Local councils will be given the right to approve boutique brothel locations. Some mayors are not totally averse to the proposal, but others are totally opposed to it. The State is split on this issue. For instance, the Mayor of Toowoomba City Council is quoted as saying that he would hate to lead the local government authority that had to approve the location of such a facility and that to approve a location would give prostitution a respectability that it did not deserve. The Logan City Council says that its residents have emphatically rejected the brothel proposal and that their council should resist the legislation.

However, in dumping the responsibility for the legislation on local councils, the Government is walking away from its responsibilities and forcing local councils to bear the costs and the problems of implementation of these changing laws. The Government says that market forces will control the number of licensed brothels in Queensland, but, in flicking licensing requirements to local councils, the Government will have no control over just how many brothels are set up and operating in the State. The Gold Coast City Council is concerned that the Surfers Paradise shopping area is one where brothels could be set up, spoiling the centre and spoiling the whole area. There is a very real fear that Surfers Paradise could end up as a red light district like Kings Cross. That is not the image that the Gold Coast wants or needs.

Small local authorities with fewer than 25,000 citizens may be able to keep their approvals down and act on community concerns, but larger councils will have no choice but to approve applications. The Government will, however, collect the licence fees from brothels through its proposed licensing authority. When poker machines first came into Queensland, there was strong and cogent argument that Queensland did not need to base its revenue benefits on gambling. That warning was ignored then and the problems associated with gambling have now reared back to bite us. It will not improve the State's reputation when a fair chunk of its future revenue comes from prostitution. It will be interesting to see how that matter is handled as Treasury prepares State Budget projections and Estimates committee hearings are planned. There are several words to describe living off the immoral earnings of prostitution, but they are not appropriate words for use in this Chamber.

The whole idea of licensing brothels in non-residential locations is to remove prostitution from suburban streets. However, as I said, the increase in prostitution by single operators has the potential to become a huge suburban problem. It is bad now; it will only get worse. The result will be boutique brothels in industrial areas and mini-brothels in residential areas. The Premier has lashed out at critics of the legislation and said that he is ensuring the quality of life of local communities. That is nonsense. Suburban prostitution cannot possibly improve the quality of life for suburban residents. Prostitution is an industry that has been riddled with criminal involvement as well as serious health risks. It is a big player on the illicit drug scene. The new legislation will not eliminate single prostitutes working on their own. Although it is designed to crack down on street soliciting, it will not take prostitution out of the suburbs.

I am afraid the attempts to regulate that crime-ridden industry will foster a boom in prostitution that will become a very lucrative business for prostitution entrepreneurs. It will become a major Queensland industry. Regional newspapers are now full of reports of the imminent arrival of southern brothel owners onto the Queensland scene. The Gold Coast Bulletin reports a Melbourne sex industry figure, a brothel and massage parlour owner, as saying that he is keen to set up shop on the Gold Coast. He said that, as a major tourist destination, the image of sun, surf and sex is a strong one. He wants to cash in on that. The mind boggles at the thought of southern sex industry bosses searching for locations on the tourist strip. Will the Gold Coast and Cairns fight it out as to which will be the sex capital of Australia like they fight over which is the tourism industry leader? Again, the Gold Coast Bulletin reports that pillars of Gold Coast society are keen to set up legal brothels if they could keep their identities secret. It is a funny sort of social scene when the players are looking to forsake property development and the stock market for big dollars from the sex industry. Property owners are looking to get huge financial returns. Big tourist dollars will bring southern brothel owners flocking to the Gold Coast. It is money for jam.

Gladstone is another major centre where prospective brothel operators are reported as getting ready to move into town. Tweed Heads brothel owners are now planning to move over the border into Queensland. In Brisbane, the Sunday Mail reports that vice bosses from southern States are poised to move into Queensland and that Victorian operators are jockeying for prime city sites, including Elizabeth and Albert Street. Will Albert Street be restored to its wartime and postwar glory? It was the brothel street of Brisbane in those days. There was another one just around the corner in Margaret Street. The

question is asked: will we see happy hours, lunchtime specials and Friday clubs flourishing on the Brisbane scene? It used to be called "afternoon delight". The expected brothel boom will produce sex business entrepreneurs looking for business high-rise sites that are close to the casino and inner city hotels. Some establishments will be very upper class catering to the carriage trade. Some will be pretty ordinary bordellos catering to lower socioeconomic levels. But trust our own Courier-Mail—it is uncritical in its support of the legislation.

Probity checks are all very well, but there is no way in the world that people with criminal records will be kept out of the sex industry. They will not find it difficult to set up people to front for them. That is already happening right now. The trade in illicit drugs is already of great concern in Queensland. That will only increase as prostitution proliferates and flourishes in Queensland. One cannot escape the fact that drugs and prostitution go hand in hand. Increase prostitution and drug dealing will increase. The Queensland Crime Commission will not know what has hit it.

We all know that this is a most difficult issue. Prostitution has flourished since the beginning of history. Governments, political parties and community groups have grappled with the problem without achieving a solution that is acceptable to the wider community. There are plenty of issues before the Queensland Parliament at the moment, but the Beattie Government seems to have lost its way on the prostitution issue. The legislation before us today is a triumph of hope over experience.

There is hope that no criminals will be involved and that only people of good character will operate brothels—high minded, pure-souled people, of course, with the good of the State and the nation at heart. There is hope that there will no longer be health problems and sexually transmitted diseases among those who engage in the sex industry, whether they be givers or takers. There is hope that only girls or boys of good character and high moral values will engage in the business of sex for money.

There is hope that only mature women and men will be engaged in the sex industry and, of course, no under-age girls and under-age boys or illegal immigrants. There is hope that sex will shift off the streets. There is hope that no crime barons or crime cartels will be involved in this lucrative market, living the high life and laundering their drug money. There is hope that the "lips that touch liquor will never touch mine" provision will work: hope that the banning of liquor in brothels will mean that all personnel take the pledge, join AA or, in any case, give up booze for good. There is hope that Queensland will be the only State able to stamp out corruption in the brothel industry. There is hope that sex will not become the biggest industry in Queensland—bigger than tourism, gambling, sugar and growing marijuana for a quick cash crop. This legislation is a triumph of hope over experience.

The sex industry itself says that the new laws will be unworkable. Many local councils will not go along with the new laws. Church and family groups are dismayed and upset by the new laws. The Australian Family Association is a lobby group most active in its opposition to the new legislation, working with the leaders of the major churches that have joined together as a body, as well as the Family Council of Queensland. We have all seen the submissions provided by the Australian Family Association, which should be congratulated on the thought and care it has put into addressing this legislation point by point as well as suggesting some very positive steps towards prostitution law reform. The association recommends strongly that the consultative process should be reopened and should include family groups and representatives from churches, the police, other law enforcement and intelligence gathering agencies, health professionals and representatives from the prostitution industry. That consultative body should meet together and not, as has been the case, each in isolation from all other interested parties.

Among many of its well-argued points, the association refutes strongly the "lesser of two evils" argument: this legislation is good because it is better than what we have now. Instead, the legislation simply will not work and will solve none of the present problems. It will make them worse as well as adding a "morally okay" tag to the legally okay green light. It is all very well to say it is better than what we had before, but it does nothing for family values. It sets a poor standard for young people growing up in Queensland. It will encourage the proliferation of legal and illegal brothels. It will pose enormous headaches for police and local councils, but it will make a lot of money—huge profits—for some operators and bring a rush of southern criminal types into the State as well as markedly increasing the drug trade in this State.

We all know that prostitution is a reality. It is the oldest profession. Men will always seek out the services of those who offer sex and will be very willing to pay high prices for those services. That has been so since time immemorial and it will not cease as long as the universe continues to exist. I do not pretend to offer facile solutions. I know that this legislation has taken a long time to prepare and the need for sensible prostitution law reform is long overdue. But this legislation is still too hasty. It fails to come to terms with the effect it will have on the broader community, and the general community does not support it. A great deal of time and effort has been put into this legislation. The Opposition started off the process when it was in Government. The present Minister, Mr Barton, has certainly put a lot of

work into it over the past year or so. It is a pity the legislation is so badly flawed that the Opposition cannot support it.

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